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Bill Will Provide Critical Consumer and Safety Protections to Americans At Sea

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, Congress took the final steps to pass legislation authored by Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) to send H.R. 3360, the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, to the President for his consideration. The bill was passed with broad, bipartisan support in the House of Representatives last year with a vote of 416-4; and passed the Senate unanimously earlier this month with one amendment. The House acted today to unanimously accept the Senate amendment, which completes final action on this legislation in Congress.

“H.R. 3360 will improve the safety and security of all cruise ship passengers traveling in and out of U.S. waters,” said Rep. Matsui. “Current law doesn’t pass the test of providing common-sense security measures to the travelling public to help protect them from crimes committed aboard ships or to adequately prevent individuals from going overboard. Moreover, current law does not provide the support victims and their families need in the event of a disaster. This legislation is critical to providing the security and safety measures that all Americans need and deserve, no matter if they are on land or at sea.”

The legislation is a critical and common-sense fix which will provide safety and security to Americans who go on cruise vacations without realizing they are not protected under U.S. laws when they leave its territorial waters. Matsui’s legislation would require the cruise industry to comply with a number of security provisions including specific rail heights, peep holes, warning devices, and cabin security measures.

Additionally, the bill necessitates that vessels are equipped with a video surveillance system to assist in documenting and prosecuting crimes, and requires vessels to maintain a log book to record reports on specified complaints. Finally, the law will mandate cruise vessel personnel to contact both the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the United States Coast Guard as soon as a crime involving homicide, suspicious deaths, missing U.S. nationals, kidnapping, assault, and other serious occurrences are reported.

“The term ‘duty free’ does not apply to the safety of passengers,” said Senator Kerry, who sponsored the companion language in the Senate. “Murky lines of jurisdiction are no longer an excuse for risking the safety of millions of Americans who will board cruise ships this year.”

“When the cruise safety legislation is signed into law, it will serve to protect Americans across the nation during what ought to be relaxing vacations,” said International Cruise Victims Association Chairman, Kendall Carver. “Without Congresswoman Matsui’s efforts in the House, this legislation would not have moved forward.”

Scott Berkowitz, president and founder of RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network) added, “RAINN applauds Congresswoman Matsui for her leadership on this important legislation, which reduces passengers’ risk of sexual assault, and expands the rights of those sexually assaulted on board. By connecting cruise passengers with the support services available through the National Sexual Assault Hotlines, this legislation provides a vital lifeline for victims on cruise ships. We look forward to working with the cruise industry to ensure that passengers in need receive the help that they deserve.”

Rep. Matsui started advocating for the modernization of existing legislation in 2006 after a constituent from her hometown of Sacramento, Laurie Dishman, came to her after being raped on a cruise ship. From that first letter, Rep. Matsui has since worked with advocates and victims’ rights organizations from all across the country to help bring this legislation to a reality.

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